

April 9, 1970

Mrs. Jules Lederer
1000 Lake Shore Plaza
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Dear Eppie:

The question you mention in your letter about the possibilities of having children blacker than either parent has come up again and again in my own teaching career. If there is a resurgence of interest in it I hope it is based on constructive curiosity, following upon recent relaxations of tabus about interracial marriage - that may be too optimistic!

Let me try to fill you in, although I really would prefer not to have any direct attribution since that may convey an undue sense of authority about my answer, or any answer that could be quoted in a few words. It is one of those situations where a little knowledge might do very considerable mischief. Were I to be asked about the expectations from the kind of mating you describe, I think I could very reasonably reassure a couple that their children would "almost certainly" be no darker than the darker parent. On the other hand, this is an area where our rigorous scientific information is much thinner than you probably imagine, and there is plenty of room for new discovery. It would be exceptional for the child to be darker than I have indicated, but I certainly do not believe it would be real grounds for suspecting his paternity. Pigmentation is the last character in the world that we could rely upon for making any crucial genetic judgments. There are many other factors, for example the blood groups, which would be much more reliable.

To give a possibly extreme example of an exception to the usual rule, it would be predicted that the mating of a Caucasian with a Negro who happened to be carrying the mutant factor for albino would certainly result in darker offspring. The generally accepted rule is, however, that children will have a level of pigmentation roughly intermediate between that of their parents.

I am enclosing a couple of pages from Curt Stern's textbook that you certainly could use as an authority for anything you wish to say about the subject.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

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